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Letter dated 9 June 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit the Co-Chairs' summary of the Madrid International Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East, held on 24 May 2017 in Madrid, as well as the Madrid Priorities for Action (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 14, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Román **Oyarzun**

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Annex

Madrid International Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East, held on 24 May 2017

Co-Chairs' summary

The Conference, which brought together 59 countries and 10 international and regional organizations, discussed the efforts needed to support the members of the communities who are targeted by Da'esh and other terrorist organizations for ethnic or religious reasons, particularly in Iraq.

The Madrid Conference is a continuation of the open debate held by the Security Council on 27 March 2015 and the International Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East held in Paris on 8 September 2015, which was co-chaired by France and Jordan. At the Paris Conference, an action plan was presented which set forth a road map for the international community to support those who are persecuted for ethnic or religious reasons, highlighting three priorities:

- Humanitarian priorities: to respond to the immediate needs of people in danger and to prepare and facilitate the voluntary and lasting return of displaced persons under safe conditions.
- Political priorities: to promote political solutions that are inclusive and respectful of human rights for all, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin, and preserve the cultural diversity of the Middle East.
- Judicial priorities: to put an end to the impunity of persons who have perpetrated crimes — some of which may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity or even genocide — against people on the grounds of their ethnic or religious origin.

The participants reiterated their support for the Co-Chairs' conclusions of the Paris Conference and the Paris Action Plan as a viable tool to address the dramatic situation of persons belonging to communities targeted by Da'esh, and other terrorist organizations, and to preserve those communities and cultures whose existence is threatened by terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria.

The aim of the Madrid Conference was to take stock of what had been done to date from the Paris Action Plan and, mainly, to determine which priorities are currently most urgent, taking into account the situation on the ground, in particular in Iraq, as well as identifying programmes, projects and actions, consistent with the needs of the Iraqi Government, to enable displaced populations to return to their homelands and to foster reconciliation and stabilization efforts, in cooperation with the already existing mechanisms that deal with the stabilization efforts.

In this regard, the participants commended the prominent achievements of the Iraqi army in liberating Mosul and other governorates and areas in Iraq from terrorists; and supported all the efforts aimed at restoring safety and security in Iraq and achieving national reconciliation through a political process that sustains the state of citizenship and ensures justice and equality for all the components of the Iraqi people, in a stable and secure nation, without exclusion or discrimination.

General political positions

The participants emphasized that, for the region, the cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of the Middle East represented a priceless heritage and should be preserved. To this end, practical programmes should be adopted to achieve progress

in crisis settlement efforts, achieve sustainable development, create opportunities and establish the values of democracy, human rights, citizenship and equality, which shall enhance the collective national identity and protect the national State and prevent racial and sectarian disintegration, towards a region of peace, enlightenment and prosperity. Terrorist organizations such as Da'esh, which is promoting religious and ethnic hatred, are committing the worst kind of atrocities and human rights abuses, of which Muslim populations are the first victims. The participants expressed their determination to redouble their efforts to restore peace and support all refugees and displaced persons, as well as the countries that host them. The contributions of those countries were praised, and they furthermore should be supported.

They agreed that a key goal of the international community and the countries concerned was to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homelands, by creating a conducive environment for their return. The ongoing efforts exerted by the international coalition against Da'esh were praised.

Priority areas

Some participants presented the actions and programmes that had been implemented since the presentation of the Paris Action Plan. Given the situation on the ground, humanitarian assistance to the displaced populations had been an important priority.

In this context, a number of priorities and projects were identified on which work could be done in the short and medium term, and which translated into specific commitments from participants.

The participants were invited to draw on the Paris Action Plan and the Madrid Priorities to carry out concrete actions ahead of the follow-up conference, announced for 2018 by the Government of Belgium.

Ayman **Safadi**
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates
of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Alfonso **Dastis**
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
of the Kingdom of Spain

Madrid Priorities for Action

The Madrid Priorities, presented during the International Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East held on 24 May 2017, are intended to address the most urgent actions needed at this moment to address the dramatic situation of persons belonging to communities targeted for ethnic or religious reasons by Da'esh and other terrorist organizations and threatened as such. Beyond the solidarity that must benefit all victims of conflict and violence, there is a pressing necessity to protect and preserve those communities and cultures whose very existence is threatened in Iraq and Syria.

Faced with this challenge, the Madrid Priorities will serve as a road map for the international community's immediate response. The aim is to identify — within these priorities — programmes, projects and actions to enable displaced populations to return and to foster reconciliation and stabilization. Participants are encouraged to draw on it to carry out concrete measures, ahead of the follow-up conference, announced for 2018 by the Belgian Government.

Priority areas

Many actions and programmes have been implemented by States and international organizations since the presentation of the Paris Action Plan on 8 September 2015. Given the situation on the ground, humanitarian assistance to the displaced populations has been an important priority in its implementation.

In view of changes in the military and political situation, with more areas liberated from Da'esh and other terrorist organizations, the international community can support programmes in order to enable the members of minorities who so wish to return to and resettle their regions of origin.

In this context, a number of priorities and projects have been identified on which work can be done in the short and medium term.

1. Helping endangered populations and facilitating their return

Helping endangered populations has a twofold objective:

- Meeting the pressing needs of displaced persons to ensure decent living conditions for them, and continuing humanitarian aid efforts, to support countries in the region most affected by the influx of refugees — Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey — and for host communities in those countries.
- As material and safety conditions gradually permit, assisting different populations in returning voluntarily to their places of origin and guaranteeing their safety, protection and access to basic social services.

Priority areas for action

Prioritize a comprehensive approach that combines humanitarian aid, stabilization and development. Several major areas for the implementation of projects have been identified, especially in the governorate of Ninawa. Participants are encouraged to support actions in these areas, in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Improving security: support the Iraqi Government, local authorities and Iraqi security forces as they secure the areas won back from Da'esh, in order to facilitate the voluntary return of all displaced populations to their homes, under sufficient security conditions. The security of routes and the protection of towns and villages have been identified as one of the most urgent priorities in order for the displaced populations to voluntarily return:

- Support training and equipment to local police and security units.
- Encourage an inclusive representation in the security forces from all components of society.

Demining:

- Clear land and property of mines and improvised explosive devices.

Stabilization: strengthen support to the Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization. The priority is to support rapid reconstruction efforts:

- Homes: the reconstruction and repair of homes has been identified as a priority for action. In the Ninawa plains, 65 per cent of homes are partially damaged, 32 per cent burned and 3 per cent totally damaged.
- Power and water supplies.
- Re-establishment of health-care and education systems.

Economic empowerment:

- Microfinance and small and medium-sized enterprise initiatives. Support microenterprise projects in Ninawa and Sinjar, particularly those supporting female heads of households.
- Agricultural livelihood projects.
- Vocational training programmes.

Special projects:

- Special support for women and children affected by conflict. Special projects to assist vulnerable communities.
- Participation of vulnerable communities in reconciliation and stabilization efforts.
- Help internally displaced persons to obtain identification documents.

2. Maintaining diversity and plurality in the Middle East

- The Conference is a reminder of the need to reinforce the inclusive nature of institutions and to organize fair, responsible and inclusive participation of all the elements of society as regards public policy and missions that are overseen by the State; and that all of this must be done at the State level, through central and regional governments.
- The international community reiterates its support for the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al-Abadi, and praises the reconciliation process that he has initiated with measures aimed at contributing to national reconciliation, promoting inclusiveness, strengthening social cohesion and reforming the security sector.
- The international community reiterates its support for the work carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).
- The objective of ensuring full, equal citizenship for all people is also reaffirmed.

Priority areas for action

Reconciliation:

- Facilitation of local reconciliation processes, promoting diversity, rebuilding trust among communities and addressing the root causes of violent extremism. Encourage religious and community leaders to denounce violence that propagates hatred, sectarianism and religious and cultural intolerance and take a leading role in promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence.
- Promote intercultural dialogue and interfaith and intra-faith dialogue in the Middle East. Support the work of international organizations and institutions such as the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and the Anna Lindh Foundation in this field, particularly with regard to young people.

Education:

- Tolerance and inclusion training programmes for teachers and students.
- Emphasize education and youth outreach. Promotion of an education project on tolerance with youth, including social media.
- Support curriculum reform with a view to promoting tolerance, including through the teaching of the history of cultural diversity in the region, as well as respect for cultural diversity in secular and religious schools in the Middle East.

- Deradicalization programmes and child soldiers' reintegration.

Security sector reform.

- Support programmes for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in Iraq.

3. Protecting endangered heritage

- Safeguarding and promoting the millennia-old heritage of the Middle East is an essential component of efforts to maintain cultural diversity and promote trust and confidence between communities in the region.

- Support for the implementation of the Strategy for Reinforcing UNESCO's Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict, adopted in 2015, and its relevant action plan, including the response plan on the protection and conservation of cultural heritage in liberated areas of Iraq, which is being prepared based on the recommendation of the international conference co-organized by the Ministry of Culture of Iraq and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and held in February 2015 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

- Need to strengthen international cooperation to ensure the full implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2253 (2015) and 2347 (2017), as well as resolutions 1483 (2003) and 2199 (2015), which impose a ban on the trade of Iraqi and Syrian cultural heritage, to fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property.

Priority areas for action

- Comprehensive damage assessment of religious heritage that has been affected/destroyed during the conflict and identify short- and medium-term needs for recovery.

- Restoration of destroyed religious heritage monuments and sites with specific significance for ethnic and religious communities in the Middle East. Restoration of shared religious heritage, notably the site of Nabi Yunus/the tomb of Jonah in Mosul, as a priority, given its contribution to both cultural recovery and social cohesion.

- Planning the recovery of historical cities, emblems of cultural diversity, notably Aleppo and Mosul, giving equal attention to physical rehabilitation and to the rebuilding of a social fabric of cultural diversity. Provide technical assistance and training to the Iraqi and Syrian heritage profession and communities with a view to enhancing capacity for protection and conservation of the heritage sites.

4. Fighting impunity and ensuring justice

- Condemnation in the strongest terms of the heinous crimes committed, especially by Da'esh and its affiliated groups, against civilian populations from all ethnic, religious or other backgrounds. The atrocities committed in Iraq and Syria, which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, or even genocide in the case of certain communities, are a source of concern for the entire international community and must not go unpunished.

- Support actions aimed at documenting Da'esh's widespread violations of international humanitarian law and the human rights of minorities in Iraq and Syria and obtaining recognition of the nature of the crimes committed.

- Support a role for the International Criminal Court in handling the most serious crimes, in particular regarding crimes committed on the basis of religion or ethnicity.
- Preservation of evidence of crimes is a priority. Support for the launch of an initiative by the Secretary-General to promote the creation of a mechanism — with no jurisdictional scope — to gather and preserve evidence of the crimes committed by Da'esh in Iraq.
- The competent United Nations bodies are invited to continue their work on the violent acts committed and their reporting thereof.

Priority areas for action

Evidence collection:

- Mass graves and victims identification. Training of in-country experts on excavation and forensics. Forensic storage and laboratory support. Technical assistance for documentation efforts.

Support accountability efforts:

- Technical assistance for the Iraqi police force and judiciary.
- Establishment of memorials and/or a national day of remembrance to foster reconciliation.

Psychological support for survivors:

- Mental health counselling programmes for internally displaced persons in Iraq and in receiving countries. Training programmes for mental health counsellors and development of undergraduate training programmes.

The participants are asked to take concrete action to pursue the goals of the Conference, protect the threatened communities in the Middle East and preserve the diversity of the region.

The United Nations agencies have presented the following projects and programmes to the Conference in order to pursue the implementation of actions in the priority areas identified:

- Project for capacity-building of the Minority Directorate of the National Reconciliation Committee in the Office of the Prime Minister of Iraq by UNAMI.
- Housing recovery and properties restitutions programme for Iraqi minorities in Ninawa by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.
- Protection of minority children in agricultural labour project by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- Support for integrated reconciliation project by UNDP.
- Launch of a regional educational and cultural initiative entitled "Exploring the past, building a future of coexistence: an initiative for intercultural skills and dialogue in the Middle East" by UNESCO.

The United Nations agencies have expressed the intention to convene an experts' meeting in New York and in the region for follow-up on these actions and projects.

The participants in the Conference are invited to draw from these priorities to carry out concrete actions ahead of the follow-up conference, announced for 2018 by the Government of Belgium.